

## **How We're Preparing for Pandemic Influenza**

For almost a year, the Alexandria Health Department has been developing plans for a potential pandemic flu outbreak. These plans recognize that we do not know when and in what form such a pandemic may occur.

A “pandemic” is any disease epidemic which is spread over a wide geographic area and that affects a large proportion of the population. Thus, it could be some form of avian flu, a type of Asian flu, or it might be some other novel strain of influenza. We do believe, however, that there is a high risk of a pandemic sometime in the not-too-distant future. The Health Department’s plans cover a broad range of actions we may need to take, including closely monitoring illnesses as they emerge.

If a pandemic should occur, action will be required from all levels of government, certainly including the City of Alexandria. As a result, Dr. Charles Konigsberg, Health Director, and Mayor William Euille, have formed a City-wide Pandemic Flu Working Group. Involving over 50 people from Alexandria, the group is currently working on a variety of issues, including communication with the public, continuity of government, preparation for potentially overwhelmed medical facilities and services, and the prioritization for distribution of a very limited supply of vaccine or anti-viral medication.

Before and during a true influenza pandemic, all of us can do some things to help minimize the spread of the disease. If health services happen to be overwhelmed in the event of an emergency, we may also need to care for our selves and our family. Here are some helpful tips:

- Start the habit of frequently washing hands.
- Cover coughs and sneezes with disposable tissues and dispose of them quickly.
- Keep a distance from sick people.
- Stay home if you are sick.
- Have a ready supply of food, water and medical supplies at home so you don’t need to go out if you are ill.
- If you work outside of the home, talk with your employer about their sick leave policy to make sure you are not penalized for staying home – and thus protecting your coworkers.

For additional information about pandemic flu, please go to <http://www.pandemicflu.gov>.

To view the Virginia Department of Health’s pandemic flu page, including a copy of the VDH Pandemic Flu Plan, go to <http://www.vdh.virginia.gov/pandemicflu>.